Australian Committee on TAFE Curriculum

Learning guide number 1

How to write a learning guide

Peter Bruhn and Hugh Guthrie
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Introduction

This learning guide is designed to help you write your own guides for use in education or training.

Learning guides are structured booklets designed to direct a learner through a series of learning activities, and to a range of resources, to achieve industry-specified competencies or learning outcomes.

This learning guide will guide you through the relevant sections of the manual entitled *Designing learning guides for TAFE and industry* by Peter Bruhn and Hugh Guthrie. You will work with this text and undertake specified activities which will help you gain the knowledge and skills to be able to produce quality learning guides and program. On completing each activity there will be a self-check section which will provide you with the necessary feedback.

To meet the learning outcomes of this guide you will need to set aside about 15-20 hours (i.e. 2-3 working days) to complete the learning activities and undertake the final assessment. (This may be spread over a number of weeks however.)
Learning outcome

On successful completion of the learning program, you will be able to:

Write one or more learning guides, of appropriate length, for an identified education or training need.

Assessment criteria:
The design process must:

- be based on an identified training need or problem
- establish an appropriate design team and process to address the identified training need
- identify any prerequisite knowledge and skills needed by trainees to undertake the program
- identify and evaluate a range of suitable existing resources for use in the program
- develop any appropriate implementation and management plans and systems.

The learning guide must:

- address the identified training need and target group
- be written at a level, and presented in a style and format, appropriate for the target group
- contain all the appropriate elements of a learning guide and its associated resources, for example introduction, learning outcomes, activities, feedback, reviews, assessment and record keeping systems.
Conditions:
With the aid of the publication *Designing Learning guides for TAFE and industry* (Bruhn and Guthrie), access to suitable resource people (e.g. training consultants, instructional designers, graphic designers) and the necessary equipment and materials.

Assessment method
Your completed learning guide and other supporting documentation will be assessed by a suitable part of experts. The process may involve a presentation by the guide developers to this panel either for clarification or justification of the chosen approach.
Prerequisites

No previous experience writing learning guides is required.

However as a trainer/instructor you will be expected to have an understanding of how adults learn, teaching technologies, strategies and methods, and assessment techniques.

If you haven’t had much experience in producing learning resources, you should read Part 1 of Bruhn and Guthrie. (The book on which this learning guide is based.) This will provide some of the background you may need. Appendix A of Bruhn and Guthrie may also be helpful.

Intended audience

- TAFE teachers who need to write education and training programs
- Trainers and instructors in industry
- Line managers with a significant training role within their organisation
Resources

To use this learning guide you will need to have access to:

- the publication titled *Designing learning guides for TAFE and industry* (1st or revised edition) written by Peter Bruhn and Hugh Guthrie. This is referred to as THE MANUAL in the rest of this learning guide.

- any necessary resource people, within or outside the organisation

- a computer to allow you to produce drafts and final copy of the text and graphics for the learning guide.

- facilities or other equipment (such as a learning resource or training centre) especially if you have plans to obtain, evaluate or develop further learning resources.

Key to symbols

These symbols are located on the left hand side of the page. They indicate an action which should be taken at a particular stage of the learning guide.

discuss  evaluate  write

meet  list
Learning activities

Activity 1—Stating the problem
Identify what it is you want the learning guide to achieve.

Read pp. 25-26 of THE MANUAL. Write a statement of the problem or identified need and compare it with the one presented on p. 26. (Your statement may be shorter, but should not be any longer than the example).

Obtain feedback from your colleagues (or members of your design team if you have decided to form one at this stage. See pages 33-34 of THE MANUAL and Activity 3 in this guide) and see if they agree with the statement. You may call a meeting to do this or just circulate your statement. Alternatively you could circulate the statement AND THEN call a meeting. Amend the statement as necessary.

Activity 2—Finding and evaluating resources
Having identified what the guide is going to do, you will now need to investigate what learning resources are available and evaluate their suitability for inclusion in your learning guide.

Read pp. 27-28 Produce a brief proposal on how you plan to locate learning resources. Have a colleague critique the process. Next (if you wish) locate and list resources which appear relevant to the topic covered by your learning guide. Obtain copies of resources if possible.

Read pp. 29-32 of the manual. Locate and select at least two potential learning resources. Using the evaluation checklist write an evaluation report for each. (Use the example on p. 32 as a guide.) You may wish to include other items on the evaluation record, depending on your own requirements. The checklist on pp. 30-31 may provide inspiration!

Show the evaluations to an appropriate colleague for feedback. (This person could be a curriculum or training officer or an instructional designer.)
**Activity 3—Forming a team**

From within (or even possibly outside!) your organisation, establish a small team to help you write the learning guide. (You may have formed such a team already during Activity 1.) Determine where you believe you need help. Is it with design? Contents?

**Read pp. 33-34 of THE MANUAL. Produce a list** which identifies who the team members are, where they are located and what their respective responsibilities will be.

Send the list to each member of the team and call a meeting to discuss time frames, cost, proposed format, etc. Document these and decide who will take on the coordinating role. (To get most out of this and later activities it would be you!)

**Activity 4 —Writing the guide: getting started.**

You can now start writing your learning guide. Pages 35-71 of THE MANUAL provide detailed information on the parts of the learning guide. More detailed material is available in the 3 references listed at the end of this guide. They will be particularly useful in this activity and in activities 5-10. Borrow these from a library or resource centre if you can. You may wish to purchase one or more of them after you have completed this package.

**Read pp. 35-36 to obtain an overview of the guide.** At this stage make some notes (and discuss with colleagues or your team the sorts of sections which your guide will need to contain).

Next **read pp. 43-52** of THE MANUAL which covers writing your introduction and learning outcomes sections. (The earlier sections on cover, title and contents pages will be dealt with later.) These first two sections, especially the learning outcomes, are the basis of the whole learning guide and you should spend some time working through this activity to make sure your statements are clear and reflect what you want your trainees to achieve when they have completed the guide.
You may need to revise the learning outcomes in the light of Activities 7 and 9. An alternative way of doing things is to attempt this activity, then do Activities 7 and 9 straight away to help you to refine the learning outcomes and assessment processes.

It is important that you receive as much feedback as possible during this activity. Consult frequently with appropriate team member(s) or colleagues to ensure that these sections are written as precisely as you can.

**Activity 5—Writing the guide: audiences, prerequisites and resources**

Read pp. 52-55 of THE MANUAL and then write the sections relating to prerequisites, intended audiences and resources.

Show your drafts to the appropriate team member(s) or colleagues who will provide you with the necessary feedback. Change as appropriate.

**Activity 6—Writing the guide: producing the learning activities**

This activity will constitute the major learning activity of the guide. It requires you to design the learning activities which link the trainee to the resources.

First, read pp. 56-61 of THE MANUAL. Second, don't try to write this section alone, get a colleague, a training consultant or instructional designer to help you plan out the learning activities. Third, look at the various activities incorporated into the learning guide examples provided at the end of THE MANUAL, to assist you with this activity.

List alternative approaches that could be used.

Share the outcomes of this collaboration with other colleagues and team members. Ask them to act as 'critical friends' and to provide you with comments on the alternative learning activities you propose for the guide.

Choose the most suitable range of activities for your purpose and list these.
Finally you need to put the activities into a logical sequence. **Produce a rough mock-up of this section of the guide.** The whole guide will be refined later (see Activity 12).

Incorporate or develop the resources evaluated in Activity 2 as appropriate. Develop new resources if necessary (refer to Activity 12 and pages 73-74 if appropriate). Make sure that the resources section of the guide (discussed in Activity 5) lists where and how any necessary resources are available.

**Activity 7—Writing the guide: providing feedback**

Once the team is in agreement with the planned activities you will need to write the self-assessment activities and answers. This provides the feedback loop so that trainees can find out how they are doing after the completion of a prescribed activity.

Read pp.61-64 of THE MANUAL. Refer to the examples of learning guides at the end of the manual and see how other guide writers have incorporated the self-assessment activities into their guides. Write your own self-assessment questions and answers. (Note: Feedback can be provided by resource people available to the trainee rather than written into the guide.)

Consult with the appropriate team member or colleague to comment on your proposed trainee feedback mechanisms.

**Activity 8—Writing the guide: reviews and summaries**

It is recommended that you write a brief review or summary section for your trainees.

Read pp. 64-67 of THE MANUAL about writing reviews. Alternatively you can design a learning activity so that the trainees have to produce their own review. Write the review section.

**Activity 9—Writing the guide: the final assessment**

Read p.68 of THE MANUAL and refer to the final assessment sections presented in the examples of learning guides at the end of the manual. Look at the checklist that has been developed to assess if the trainee has achieved the learning outcomes(s).
You must now write the section which directs the trainee to undertake a final assessment (or competency assessment) based on the learning outcome(s) you wrote earlier (see Activity 4).

Use your trainer or a person with a background in assessment to evaluate or critique your proposed final assessment for the learning guide.

**Activity 10—Writing the guide: the glossary**

This activity is optional. If you are writing a learning guide which contains terms unfamiliar to the trainee you may need to write a glossary. If you need to include one in your guide, read pp. 68-69 of THE MANUAL. Use the example on page 69 as a guide for producing your own glossary.

**Activity 11—Writing the guide: references and further reading**

The final section of a learning guide is the references or further reading section. Read pp. 70-71 of THE MANUAL. Produce your own annotated list. Get a team member to check it. This section is useful for those trainees who wish to extend their background knowledge and skills.

**Activity 12—Writing the guide: bringing it all together**

This final activity should be a team effort. This is the stage where the guide can be assembled and the cover, title and contents pages produced. (Read pp. 36-42 of THE MANUAL). If appropriate, consult with a graphic designer at this stage about the final look of the guide. For your own information, read pp. 75-87 regarding presentation guidelines for learning guide writers.

If you need to include extra information sheets, etc., refer to pp. 73-74 on writing supplementary materials. By the end of this activity the package should be complete. Make sure you get some comments on it at this stage from a range of experts: it's best if they have had nothing to do with its development so far.
Review

Now that you have worked through the program, let us review the major steps in writing a learning guide:

1. You identified the educational training need or problem for which a learning guide will need to be developed.

2. You identified what learning resources were available and produced a written evaluation summary of these.

3. You established your learning guide design team.

4. You methodically went about preparing each section of the learning guide, in consultation with appropriate team members or colleagues.

5. You incorporated optional sections, such as a glossary or supplementary materials, into your learning guide.

6. When all the sections had been written and approved by the team, the team's designer assisted you and the other members in producing the final product. This included the cover, title and contents pages, packaging and the overall look of the guide. The completed package was shown to other experts for comment.
Final assessment

The final assessment of this program is based on the learning outcome detailed on page 2 of the guide.

You will be required to submit your final learning guide to an assessment panel, members of which have had no previous involvement with its development.

This assessment panel will be chosen by a senior member of your organisation and may comprise:

- one or more members of staff with expertise in the content area covered by the learning guide
- any appropriate line managers
- a training specialist
- a person with graphic design or desktop publishing skills.

The assessment criteria for determining your successful completion of the programme are listed in the learning outcome of this guide, on page 2.
Further reading


  This book has become one of the standard references on designing and writing instructional materials. It emphasises layout and the visual presentation of text and diagrams. It also contains current research on typography and its use in instructional materials. Highly recommended.


  A well-presented book on the design and use of the full range of instructional media. Has 13 appraisal checklists on various media. These checklists are useful for evaluating learning resources.


  If you are serious about writing learning guides you should purchase this book; it's one of our favourite texts on learning materials development, 386 pages in length and covers every aspect of producing self-instructional materials. Should be in every guide writer's reference library. Great value.